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Central Intelligence Agency

Washington, D.C. 20505

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

14 September 1983

Pakistan: Prospects for President Zia

President Zia ul-Haq is coping successfully with the current disturbances in Pakistan--the most serious threat to his rule so far. We believe his regime's capable handling of serious anti-government rioting in Sind Province coupled with the unwillingness of Pakistanis in other provinces to join the protest movement increase the chances that Zia and the Army will continue to guide Pakistan's political future for at least the next one to two years.

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-- Zia's authoritarian regime has avoided overly repressive policies, though it has dealt firmly with organized demonstrations. It has given the country more than six years of domestic stability and substantial economic progress.

-- Zia also has dealt effectively with external threats. He has stood up to the Soviets on Afghanistan, while keeping channels open to a negotiated settlement; he has improved relations with India; and he has succeeded in gaining major economic aid and arms assistance from the United States.

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The President ultimately depends on the Army to remain in power. Most senior officers support Zia's plan for a phased return to civilian government and a permanent oversight role for the armed forces.

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-- No ruler, however, can be certain of the Army's support if it is called upon to put down civil disorders, particularly in the all-important province of Punjab.

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Zia's main opposition, the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD), a coalition of eight opposition parties, is

This memorandum was prepared by the South Asia Division, Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis, in preparation for the Secretary of Defense's trip to Pakistan. Information as of September 12, 1983 was used in preparation of this paper. Comments and queries are welcome and should be addressed to Chief, South Asia Division.

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poorly organized and so far has lacked both a popular issue or an effective leader to galvanize a nationwide anti-Zia campaign.

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-- The protest movement in Sind Province this summer was launched largely by the Pakistan People's Party of former Prime Minister Bhutto. The PPP has strong support in Sind, Bhutto's home province, and succeeded in rousing violent protests by playing on local grievances against the Punjabi-dominated government and Army.

25X1

-- The PPP has substantial support among the urban and rural poor of Punjab, but has found it difficult to mobilize this support in the absence of a strong leader. Most of the PPP faithful look to Bhutto's daughter Benazir, but she has been kept under house arrest for the past two and one-half years.

25X1

President Zia has promised to hold provincial and national elections by March 1985, amend the Constitution to create a strong presidential system, and withdraw martial law. His statements suggest he will bar hostile opposition parties--including the PPP--from participating in the elections. These parties and some influential interest groups believe they are losing ground under Zia and could coalesce against him.

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Given the right circumstances, we believe a nationwide opposition movement could arise rapidly and with little warning. In such an event, the Army probably would replace Zia with another general who would negotiate a return to civilian rule on terms the Army could accept.

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-- In our view, the Army would attempt to preserve the present US-Pakistan relationship, but if a Pakistan People's Party government succeeded in taking over, US-Pakistan ties, as well as Pakistan's stand on Afghanistan, probably would be significantly weakened.

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Pakistan: Perceptions of Relations with the US

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US-Pakistani relations have improved since 1980, but these gains are fragile. The two nations' Afghanistan policies and caution regarding Soviet aims in South Asia are convergent interests. However, [REDACTED] US arms embargoes in 1965 and 1971 plus the temporary suspension of economic aid in 1979 have convinced most Pakistanis that Washington is an unreliable ally. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] Pakistani officials in general are receptive to expanding contacts with the US.

-- Few Pakistani officials believe, however, that the US would support Pakistan if it were attacked by India, and there are doubts about US willingness--and capability--to come to Pakistan's assistance in the event of a Soviet attack. [REDACTED] some army officers believe Zia has placed too much trust in Washington and believe that the US may again abandon Pakistan after the Afghanistan conflict is resolved.

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[REDACTED]

Popular perceptions of the US are more ambiguous [REDACTED]

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-- US military and economic assistance is widely publicized and appears to have made a positive impact. However, most Pakistanis reject US Middle East policy, which they charge

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is biased in favor of Israel. Many are suspicious that the US remains hostile to Tehran because it cannot tolerate a "truly Islamic government" and believe Pakistan would be subject to similar pressure should it follow Iran's example.

- Many Pakistanis, including those with ties to the military and the bureaucratic elite, condemn US policy on nuclear nonproliferation as applied to Pakistan. They assert it is intended to prevent the development of domestic nuclear power facilities and to retard Pakistan's ability to achieve economic independence. They reject as hypocritical US claims it is attempting to stop the spread of nuclear weapons and point to Washington's willingness to continue assistance to India, which has exploded a nuclear device.

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- Zia's political opponents are attempting to exploit US military and economic assistance to portray the President as a US puppet. Politicians on the left and center repeatedly assert that Zia could not survive without US support. Scattered anti-American incidents occurred during recent anti-regime demonstrations in Sind Province.

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